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STATE FOR NEA/ARP, NEA/PPD, NEA/PI, AND INR/R/MR
STATE PASS USTR FOR N. MOORJANI, J. BUNTIN
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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: OMAN'S MAJLIS ELECTIONS

REF: MUSCAT 992

¶1. SUMMARY: All Omani dailies carry prominent features and articles on elections for the sixth round of the Majlis Ash-Shura (84-member lower house of parliament). "Oman" regrets that no women were elected but anticipates their return in the near future. "Al-Watan" hails the "positive signs" in the elections including high voter turnout and the election of well-educated and experienced candidates. END SUMMARY.

COVERAGE

¶2. Per Reftel, in the days leading up to voting for Oman's Majlis Ash-Shura (84-member lower house of parliament) on October 27, all Omani dailies carried substantial material exhorting registered voters to turn out and providing details on the organization and mechanics of the election. On the day itself, coverage focused almost exclusively on getting out the vote. Coverage on the morning after was factual. The headline in government-owned, English-language "Daily Observer" (circulation 20,000) proclaimed "New Majlis Ash-Shura Members Elected." State Arabic daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) carried a headline that read "Congratulations Oman." The "Observer" held the presses until early morning in order to carry a full page showing all 84 winners, while the private English daily "Tribune" (circulation 8,000) broke ranks very slightly from the generally sunny tone by headlining "New Majlis without A Woman" (before returning to form with subheads "Voter Turnout Surpasses Expectations" and "Motivated Electorate Reinforces His Majesty's Faith").

BLOCK QUOTES: WOMEN WILL RETURN TO MAJLIS

¶3. On October 29, "Oman" carried an editorial about the Majlis Ash-Shura elections entitled, "Women's Inclusion Prevented":

"[The lack of any women elected to the Majlis Ash-Shura in the most recent elections] was not expected, and it was a shame, but that's what happens in democracy. People choose what they want... In my opinion, the absence of women does not serve the development of the Majlis in our country. The country gave people the freedom to vote and they chose whom they preferred, but this shouldn't obscure the numerous positive contributions that women make to Omani society in education and in numerous other fields... Democracy and freedom of choice deprived us of a woman in this upcoming Shura, but I expect that they will return powerfully. Perhaps women are taking two steps back for now, only to return more powerfully the next time."

"POSITIVE SIGNS" IN MAJLIS ELECTIONS

¶4. On October 29, privately-owned daily "Al-Watan" also carried an editorial about the Majlis Ash-Shura elections entitled, "Signs of the Elections:"

"There were some positive signs in the elections for the sixth round of the Majlis Ash-Shura, including excellent organization, high voter turnout, and the election of well-educated and experienced members. This was all in tune with our society's development, far from the traditions or the experiments of others [i.e. the United States] who are unaware of the goals with which we perform this exercise... Those who administered the elections ensured that there was no bias and that every candidate had an equal chance... We regard these signs as reflecting the firm desire of the electorate to actively develop the Majlis and to support the government efforts aimed at serving the nation and its citizens."

GRAPPO